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Chairman's Message

Eric Buermann, Governing Board Chairman



An exciting groundbreaking took place at the Governing Board meeting this month as the South Florida Water Management District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers "broke ground" on a new day in the state-federal partnership for Everglades restoration.

It began with the arrival of Brigadier General Todd Semonite, Commander of the South Atlantic Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with a subsequent visit by Colonel Alfred Pantano, Commander of the Corps' Jacksonville District. Then, I had the privilege of joining Terrence "Rock" Salt, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, in signing the Master Agreement for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) on behalf of our respective agencies.

The auditorium crowd sat in anticipatory silence as we formalized the documents and then erupted with enthusiastic applause, and yes, a standing ovation. Signing these important accords was indeed a great moment for Everglades restoration progress.

The Master Agreement represents many years of negotiating to develop the umbrella framework governing all construction-related activities for CERP projects. It strengthens the state-federal partnership by establishing joint decision-making by the District and the Corps. It defines conditions to achieve the 50-50 cost share by our two agencies on design and construction. And it also adds a cost-share component by the Corps for annual operations and maintenance of CERP projects.

These are not small or inconsequential details. They are significant components of a multibillion-dollar restoration effort that requires significant, long-term investments by two government partners. Without a Master Agreement, Everglades restoration progress risked facing discouraging and unacceptable delays.

Instead, we now have all the tools in place to move steadily forward. Even better, we also have federal funding in place to get some projects built. First in line is Picayune Strand, one of several CERP projects that are "shovel-ready" and the beneficiaries of stimulus funding and Congressional appropriations. To put this funding to work, Secretary Salt and I also signed the Picayune Strand Project Partnership Agreement, which defines the terms, conditions and agency responsibilities specific to this project.

With its impending construction work on Picayune Strand, the Corps will build on the progress made by the District at this restoration site. Under the state's own initiative, the District was able to fast-track construction on canal plugging and road removal from the failed 1960s residential development. Already, 13,000 acres of natural habitat have been refitted from environmental improvement.

A final note on this historic day: Our state-federal accords were witnessed by a full, nine-member SFWMD Governing Board. Several weeks ago, Governor Charlie Crist rounded out our Board with three outstanding appointments: Joe Collins, of Sebring; Gladys Perez, of Miami; and Kevin Powers, of Indiantown. Their swearing-in marked yet another achievement at this month's memorable meeting. It promises to be a great year.

Momentum for Everglades Restoration Continues with Historic State-Federal Agreements

Key accords with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers support renewed progress for restoration projects



In an historic achievement that lays critical groundwork for Everglades restoration for decades to come, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approved landmark agreements on August 13 that allow federally funded work to move forward on key Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects.

"The agreements signed today move America's Everglades significantly closer to realizing restoration goals," said SFWMD Governing Board Chair Eric Buermann. "With our shared goals memorialized in these historic accords, we can now press forward with our federal partners to build on Florida's achievements, bring projects to completion and accomplish the important vision of reviving America's Everglades."



In the most significant of the agreements, the Governing Board approved the Master Agreement, which serves as the umbrella accord between the District and the Corps to govern all Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan projects. The Master Agreement is also an essential step necessary for the Corps to begin work using an infusion of approximately \$115 million received this year in Congressional appropriations for CERP project construction.

"The robust partnership forged and strengthened during the negotiation of these significant programmatic accords serves as a model of federal and state cooperation to achieve vital goals," said Terrence "Rock" Salt, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, who joined in the momentous signing. "We can now move forward with our partners in restoring America's Everglades to protect this national treasure for future generations."

Key features of the Master Agreement include:

- Focusing on "mutuality" and strengthening the state-federal partnership for Everglades restoration by establishing joint decision-making by the SFWMD and the Corps.
- Establishing and defining conditions under which the Corps and SFWMD will achieve a 50-50 programmatic cost-share on design and construction of CERP projects.
- Defining conditions for the Corps to provide 50 percent of the annual costs for operations and maintenance of all CERP projects, an important cost-sharing provision authorized by the U.S. Congress.

"The District and the Corps share a stalwart resolve to move restoration efforts forward," said Ken Ammon, SFWMD Deputy Executive Director for Everglades Restoration. "The Master Agreement provides the basis for moving forward on significant construction projects to protect America's Everglades and South Florida's ecosystem."

Project Partnership Agreement also approved

While the Master Agreement provides the framework for restoration efforts, project-specific agreements, known as Project Partnership Agreements, are also needed. These are required for the federal government to initiate construction on specific projects. They also provide project-specific credit to the SFWMD for its land acquisition and project construction efforts completed so far.

The Governing Board today approved the Picayune Strand Project Partnership Agreement, defining the terms, conditions and responsibilities specific to this restoration project. Significantly, the agreement allows the Corps to begin investing \$65 million in stimulus funding and Congressional appropriations to continue construction on the Picayune Strand Restoration Project.

The Corps' effort on Picayune Strand will build on the significant progress made at this restoration site by the State of Florida and the SFWMD, including investing approximately \$150 million to place 55,000 acres in public ownership, filling and plugging 7 miles of the Prairie Canal, completing 25 percent of road removal necessary for restoration and restoring 13,000 acres of natural habitat.

A 50-50 partnership between the State of Florida and the federal government, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan provides a framework and guide to restore, protect and preserve the water resources of central and southern Florida. The State of Florida and the South Florida Water Management District have invested approximately \$2.4 billion toward this effort, including approximately \$300 million in construction. Through June 30, 2009, 59 percent — or approximately 230,000 acres — of the estimated lands needed to implement CERP have been acquired. For more information, visit www.sfwmd.gov/everglades.

For more information on restoration progress in the Everglades, read [Reviving the River of Grass](#) for further details.

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EAA Phosphorus Reduction Again Surpasses Everglades Water Quality Requirement



For the 14th consecutive year, water flowing out of the farmlands in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) and into the Everglades achieved phosphorus reductions that were again better than the 25-percent reduction required by law. With the continued implementation of improved farming techniques, results for the 2009 monitoring period show a 68-percent phosphorus reduction in the 500,000-acre EAA farming region south of Lake Okeechobee.

"The region's agricultural community has continually strengthened its commitment to protecting and improving South Florida's ecosystems," said SFWMD Governing Board Chair Eric Buermann. "The solid performance record and continued commitment will serve to further improve water quality."

Phosphorus reductions were largely achieved through Best Management Practices, or BMPs. BMPs are improved ways of farming — all with the goal of improving water quality. In the EAA, the most commonly used BMPs are improved fertilizer application, improved stormwater pumping practices and erosion controls to reduce the amount of phosphorus

discharge to the Everglades and connected water bodies.

Phosphorus can harm the Everglades ecosystem when stormwater runoff carries excess amounts into the protected wetlands. To meet the requirements of Florida's Everglades Forever Act, the amount of phosphorus leaving the EAA must be 25 percent less than before phosphorus-reduction efforts started. Data for the 2009 annual monitoring period show that a 68-percent phosphorus

reduction was achieved this year. The average reduction from the implementation of BMPs over the program's 14-year history is 54 percent, more than twice the amount required by law.

When measured in actual mass, 278 metric tons of phosphorus were prevented from entering the regional canal system, which sends water into the Everglades, during the monitoring period from May 1, 2008, to April 30, 2009. Over the past 14 years, the BMP program kept approximately 2,000 metric tons of phosphorus out of the Everglades.

Together with best farming practices, water leaving the EAA receives additional treatment in one of several Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) before entering the Everglades. These wetlands — constructed by the SFWMD — are filled with native vegetation and use "green" technology to further reduce phosphorus levels. Since 1994, STAs south of Lake Okeechobee — with a combined area of more than 52,000 acres — have retained more than 1,200 metric tons of phosphorus that would have otherwise entered the Everglades. The latest data indicate that through treatment wetlands and the BMP program, more than 3,200 metric tons of phosphorus have been prevented from entering the Everglades. Overall, Florida has invested more than \$1.8 billion to improve Everglades water quality since 1994.

While the EAA continues to meet its targets, work is continuing to improve water quality in the C-139 Basin, approximately 170,000 acres of primarily pasture land, row crops, citrus and sugarcane located west of the EAA. Unlike the EAA, the predominantly sandy soils and gravity drainage within the C-139 Basin present unique challenges to achieving nutrient reductions.

While the C-139 Basin achieved phosphorus reduction goals in 2008, results for Water Year 2009 (May 1, 2008 – April 30, 2009) indicate the basin fell short of targets in the Everglades Forever Act. A BMP program has been in place for seven years in the C-139 Basin.

The District is currently expanding several water quality improvement projects to further enhance its water cleaning efforts:

- The SFWMD Governing Board approved a 4,656-acre expansion of treatment wetlands in southeast Hendry County. Construction of "Compartment C," a \$47.5 million investment in restoration, will connect two existing Stormwater Treatment Areas (STA-5 and STA-6) in the EAA and more than double water treatment capability at the site.
- The renovation of Stormwater Treatment Area 5 in Hendry County is enhancing plant growth and water movement through the 8,000-acre treatment marsh. District crews moved 407,270 cubic yards of soil in STA-5, shaping the land surface more evenly so that a larger area of wetland vegetation can improve the treatment area's ability to remove phosphorus from Everglades-bound waters.

The District's historic plan to purchase land from the U.S. Sugar Corporation represents the next step in improving Everglades water quality, complementing the BMP program with a managed system of storage and treatment to protect Florida's coastal estuaries and to better revive, restore and preserve the fabled River of Grass. Environmental benefits include:

- Increasing water storage to reduce harmful freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee to Florida's coastal rivers and estuaries.
- Improving delivery of cleaner water to the Everglades.
- Preventing tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades.
- Eliminating the need for "back-pumping" water into Lake Okeechobee.

For more information on the SFWMD's water quality improvement initiatives, please see [Just the Facts: Progress in Everglades Water Quality Improvements \[PDF\]](#).

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Chairman's Opinion, *River of Grass* Bond Validation

Eric Buermann, Chairman, South Florida Water Management District Governing Board



There is no mistaking the groundswell of support for the South Florida Water Management District's purchase of land from U.S. Sugar Corporation for Everglades restoration. Leaders in national, state and local governments have publicly endorsed the acquisition, calling it, in the words of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, "an historic turning point for the largest watershed restoration project in the world."

Environmental groups, the watchdogs of restoration progress, have proclaimed this an important step forward, a "priceless, breathtaking opportunity." And newspapers from Miami to Pensacola, as well as others across the nation, agree with our view: that this is "fresh hope" — in the opinion of the *New York Times* — for protecting and restoring America's Everglades.

This makes the legal challenge by a small minority of interests who oppose the land acquisition a frustrating step along the path to progress. To be clear, their challenge does not oppose environmental improvements. It does not question the need for more water storage and treatment. Instead, the challengers are using the procedural step of court validation of

the District's bonds for financing the acquisition as an attempt to simply block the deal.

Let me remind the naysayers where this land purchase will take us. Owning vast acreage south of Lake Okeechobee presents an

unprecedented opportunity for water storage and treatment — the very backbone of restoration success. More reservoirs will mean fewer freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers and their fragile estuaries. More treatment marshes will improve delivery of cleaner water to the water conservation areas and Everglades National Park. And the once-common practice of “backpumping” water into Lake Okeechobee will become a thing of the past.

These environmental benefits are important to South Florida’s future, and we stand on the brink of acquiring the land to achieve them. At no other time in recent history — including when the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) was developed in the 1990s — has acreage of this magnitude been made available to the public to serve our collective needs. Indeed, if such acreage had been available when CERP was being designed, the framework of projects for Everglades restoration would have turned out very differently.

In negotiating this exceptional purchase, we at the District have prudently modified the contract terms to reflect changing fiscal realities. We have identified key parcels for the initial acquisition. And we have moved steadily forward with a public planning process to put the best project ideas on the table. When a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity like this arises, it takes vision and resolve to move forward despite attempts by a vocal minority to throw down roadblocks. I can assure you that we see the vision. And we are resolved to build a healthier environment for South Florida. Now is the time to make this happen.

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My Word: Comprehensive Water Conservation Program a Multifaceted Strategy

Jerry Montgomery, Vice-Chair, South Florida Water Management District Governing Board



A recent *Orlando Sentinel* editorial regarding water restrictions by the South Florida Water Management District narrowly focused only on the number of days that residents water their lawns. The article missed the key point that outdoor irrigation is only one part of using water efficiently and protecting water resources.

Safeguarding the water supply for more than 7.5 million residents from Orlando to the Florida Keys requires a multifaceted strategy. The South Florida Water Management District has achieved this by adopting a Comprehensive Water Conservation Program, which is designed to reduce water use while building a lasting water conservation ethic throughout the region.

Many significant District efforts, not mentioned by the *Sentinel*, support this goal.

In 2007, the District adopted the landmark Regional Water Availability Rule. This prevents any new water withdrawals from having a harmful impact on the Everglades and Loxahatchee River. The rule requires cities and developers needing additional water to seek alternative sources that are not dependent on the Everglades. The rule is now a principle requirement in the District’s consumptive use permitting program.

Education is also a key component of any program to reduce water use. The District held 28 workshops in 2008 with 556 teachers, reaching nearly 13,000 students as part of “The Great Water Odyssey” educational program. In addition, the District regularly hosts water conservation workshops for homeowners associations and community groups. A District Web site, www.savewaterfl.com, provides a plethora of water-saving resources.

The District is also partnering with the St. Johns River Water Management District in the Florida Water Star program, which encourages residents to install water-efficient appliances, plumbing fixtures, irrigation systems and landscapes.

In our state’s Water Resources Act, the Florida legislature this year agreed that “smart” irrigation systems using soil moisture sensors can save more water than conventional time-controlled irrigation systems. To deliver water-saving benefits, these systems do not need to be subject to specific day-of-the-week watering restrictions.

The District is committed to building consensus among stakeholders for a year-round landscape irrigation rule that achieves meaningful water use efficiency and savings. Such a rule could account for the varying climate, landscapes and hydrology of diverse watersheds within the 16-county District.

The *Orlando Sentinel* editorial does correctly point out that irrigation restrictions allowing twice-weekly watering remain in place throughout most of South Florida. Yet it is the complement of this and our other longer-term measures that will truly protect water resources into the future.

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Tweet, Tweet Goes the SFWMD

Pilot Twitter account another way to keep public informed

The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) recently launched a pilot program on Twitter as part of its continuing effort to find innovative ways to inform the public about its activities and initiatives.

"The District strives to be on the cutting edge of technology as we manage and protect the water resources of South Florida," said SFWMD Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle. "It should be no different when it comes to sharing information with the 7.5 million people we serve. Our Twitter feed will allow us to directly communicate with an increasingly busy public about the District's initiatives."

Twitter marks the District's first use of popular social media Web tools and provides the agency with another avenue to distribute information. In fewer than 140 characters, the agency plans to use its feed to:

- Distribute press releases
- Promote events and public meetings
- Deliver customer service information
- Release emergency management announcements

To follow the District's tweets, please visit twitter.com/sfwmd. For more information about the South Florida Water Management District, visit www.sfwmd.gov.

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Water Conservation Projects Receive Funding

WaterSIP grants help save millions of gallons of water each year



Recognizing the importance of promoting and supporting water conservation, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board recently approved investments in five projects for fiscal year 2010 through the agency's Water Savings Incentive Program (WaterSIP).

"Water conservation remains the most cost-effective way of protecting and stretching South Florida's limited water supply well into the future," said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Eric Buermann. "For a modest investment, WaterSIP has helped save millions of gallons of water each year, protecting a valuable resource for more than 7.5 million people and our environment."

The five projects supported by WaterSIP in 2010 will save an estimated 102 million gallons of water per year. When the projects are completed, the District will contribute nearly \$150,000 in funding assistance to the following recipients:

- **Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department (\$75,000):** Retrofitting 1,000 homes owned by seniors or low-income residents and built before 1985, with high-efficiency showerheads, toilets and aerators.
- **Lee County Utilities (\$14,646):** Purchasing and installing 16 automatic flushing devices near the extreme ends of the potable water distribution system.
- **City of Fort Lauderdale (\$15,000):** Purchasing and installing 10 automatic flushing devices for potable water distribution lines near the boundaries of the city's service area.
- **Palm Beach Parks and Recreation Department (\$37,120):** Purchasing and installing a computerized irrigation management system for South County Regional Park.
- **City of North Miami Beach (\$8,000):** Installing battery-powered controllers and rain sensors in 40 medians.

Created in 2002, the Water Savings Incentive Program provides matching funds up to \$75,000 to water providers and large users for installing water-saving technology. Qualifying WaterSIP projects include high-efficiency irrigation equipment, low-flow indoor plumbing retrofits and automatic flushing devices for fire hydrants.

From 2002 through 2009, the Water Savings Incentive Program has invested \$3.36 million in 116 projects throughout the District's 16-county region. Those projects have saved an estimated 2.1 billion gallons of water per year. For more information about WaterSIP, visit www.sfwmd.gov/watersip.

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3,000 Native Trees, Shrubs Planted to Replace Exotics on Tree Islands

Habitat restoration begins at Rotenberger Wildlife Management Area



In the ongoing effort to protect the Everglades from invasive species, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is restoring natural habitat in a 19-acre section of the Rotenberger Wildlife Management Area, a 29,000-acre tract of remnant Everglades in southwestern Palm Beach County. A team of workers recently planted 3,000 native trees and shrubs on tree islands in the management area as part of the restoration effort.

District scientists are working in partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to remove the exotic Peruvian primrose willow and Brazilian pepper from the tree islands, which prevent native species from thriving in the area.

"The Brazilian pepper may not draw as many headlines as Burmese pythons, but the damage this exotic species does to the South Florida ecosystem can be just as devastating," said SFWMD Governing Board member Patrick Rooney. "By replacing the Brazilian pepper and other invasive species with native plants, we are restoring this slice of the Everglades to its natural state."

Tree islands occur in the Everglades at elevations slightly higher than the surrounding marsh areas. Their distinctive plant communities provide critical habitat for a multitude of animals, including white-tailed deer, alligators, dozens of bird species and the endangered Florida panther.

The new mix of 17 native tree and shrub species on the Rotenberger tree islands includes buttonbush, leather fern, bald cypress, cocoplum, dahoon holly, gumbo limbo, firebush and wild coffee. With the plantings complete at the site, scientists will evaluate the overall success of the project by measuring soil buildup or depletion, stress levels of the newly planted trees and shrubs, canopy development and use by wildlife.

The SFWMD Vegetation Management Division is responsible for managing nuisance and invasive exotic vegetation throughout the 16-county District. The implementation of a vegetation management program is necessary to ensure the continued use and function of the region's water resources and preservation of South Florida's conservation lands.

For more information on the District's Vegetation Management Program, please visit www.sfwmd.gov.

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SFWMD Recognized for Excellence in Governmental Budgeting



The Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) has again recognized the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) with its Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the agency's 2008/2009 annual budget. The award is the highest form of recognition in governmental budgeting and the highest honor bestowed by the GFOA.

In addition, the GFOA has recognized the SFWMD's annual budget as Outstanding as a Communications Device. A Certificate of Recognition was presented to SFWMD Budget Director Douglas Bergstrom for his role in spearheading the budget presentation.

"We are honored that our budget document was recognized as an Outstanding Communications Device," said SFWMD Governing Board Chair Eric Buermann. "A budget document that is easily understood and clearly communicates how the agency is investing public dollars demonstrates that we are achieving our goal of full financial transparency. The residents of Central and South Florida can rely on this agency to administer their tax dollars efficiently and effectively as we continue to manage and protect the water resources of a

growing population while safeguarding the natural environment."

To receive the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award, a government agency must demonstrate that it follows nationally recognized guidelines for effective budget presentation. A judging panel determined the District's 2008/2009 annual budget document was proficient as a policy statement, financial plan and operations guide and outstanding as a communications tool.

"These awards reaffirm how fortunate we are to have such talented professionals managing the District's financial resources," added SFWMD Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle. "We are proud of their accomplishments and will continue to rely on them to produce budgets that clearly show our agency's commitment to being a responsible steward of public money."

With offices in Chicago and Washington, D.C., the GFOA is a nonprofit professional association serving approximately 17,500 government finance professionals throughout North America. The GFOA's Distinguished Budget Presentation Awards Program is the only national awards program in governmental budgeting.

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